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Scientology: Anatomy of a Frightening Cult

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IN THE LATE 1940s, pulp writer L. Ron Hubbard declared, "Writing for a penny a word is ridiculous. If a man really wants to make a million dollars, the best way would be to start his own religion."

Hubbard *did* start his own religion, calling it the "Church of Scientology," and it has grown into an enterprise today grossing an estimated \$100 million a year worldwide. His churches have paid him a percentage of their gross, usually ten percent, and stashed untold riches away in bank accounts in Switzerland and elsewhere under his and his wife's control. Surrounded by aides who cater to his every whim, he reportedly lives on church-owned property, formerly a resort, in Southern California.

Scientology is one of the oldest, wealthiest—and most dangerous—of the major "new religions" or cults operating in America today. Some of its fanatic operatives have engaged in burglary, espionage, kidnapping and smear campaigns to further their goals. Says Assistant U.S. Attorney Raymond Banoun, who directed a massive investigation that resulted in conspiracy or theft convictions of nine top Scientology officials in Washington, D.C., last October: "The evidence presented to the court shows brazen criminal campaigns against private and public organizations and individuals. The Scientology officials hid behind claims of religious liberty while inflicting injuries upon every element of society."

Sci-Fi Fantasy. In 1950 Hubbard, then 39, published *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*. In 1954 he founded the first Church of Scientology in Washington, D.C. By

1978 the organization claimed 38 U.S. churches, with 41 more abroad, and 172 "missions" and 5,437,000 members worldwide. These claims are highly doubtful; critical observers have estimated a hard core of around 3000 full-time staff and no more than 30,000 adherents in the United States.

Even so, Hubbard may live more regally than did the Maharajah of Jaipur, whose 30-room mansion and 57-acre estate in England Hubbard bought in the late 1950s as "world headquarters" for his growing movement. His retinue includes young women, known officially as "messengers," who light his ever-present cigarettes and catch the ashes. They record every word he says, including his frequent obscene outbursts of rage. They help him out of bed in the morning, run his shower, dress him. They scrub his office for a daily "white glove" inspection and rinse his laundry in 13 fresh waters. (Former members say he erupts volcanically if he sniffs soap on his clothes.)

Hubbard attracts and holds his worshipful followers by his amazing capacity to spin out an endless science-fiction fantasy in which he is the supreme leader of a chosen elite. He tells them he is a nuclear physicist who was severely wounded while serving with the U.S. Navy in World War II. "Taken crippled and blinded" to a Naval hospital, he claims to have "worked his way back to fitness and full perception in less than two years." In the process, he developed the "research" that led him to discov-

er "Dianetics" and Scientology, the answers to most of mankind's ills.

The truth is something else. Hubbard did take a college course in molecular and atomic physics, which he flunked. He served in the Navy, but Navy records do not indicate he saw combat or was ever wounded. He was discharged and later given a 40-percent disability pension because of an ulcer, arthritis and other ailments. About this time he was petitioning the Veterans Administration for psychiatric care to treat "long periods of moroseness and suicidal inclinations." He was also arrested for petty theft in connection with checks. When he wrote to the FBI that communist spies were after him, an agent attached a note to one of his letters: "Make 'appears mental' card."

"Robot-like." Since *Dianetics*, Hubbard's bizarre "philosophy" has expanded into a 25-million-word collection of books, articles and tape-recorded lectures. Hubbard claims to have traced human existence back 74 trillion years, suggesting it began on Venus. Today's earthlings are material manifestations of eternal spirits who are reincarnated time and again over the eons. But, Hubbard claims, our earthly troubles often result from ghostly mental images which he calls "engrams"—painful experiences either in this life or in former incarnations.

Hubbard's original book created a sensation; he claimed to have "cleared" 270 cases of engrams, thus greatly increasing the subjects' I.Q.s

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